

SENATOR KAREN KEISER

33RD LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



HOW TO CONTACT SENATOR KAREN KEISER

Olympia Office:
PO Box 40433
Olympia, WA 98504-0433

E-mail: keiser_ka@leg.wa.gov

Web Site: www.sdc.wa.gov/keiser.htm

Phone: (360) 786-7664
Fax: (360) 786-1999
Toll-Free Legislative Hot Line:
1-800-562-6000

Committees:
Health & Long-Term Care, Chair

Financial Institutions,
Housing & Consumer Protection

Labor, Commerce, Research & Development

Memberships:
Long-Term Care Financing Task Force

Health and Long-Term Care 2006 Legislative Session

Senate Democrats began the session seeking to improve the state's readiness to respond to natural disasters, boost access to affordable health care and address the long-simmering medical malpractice issues. The bills passed this session are significant steps toward those goals.

2006 Session Victories

BOOSTING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS:

- **Pandemic influenza.** With experts saying that a pandemic flu is inevitable, the Senate passed legislation requiring local health districts to develop emergency response plans by Jan. 1, 2007. The bill also provides \$9 million in grants and other support so local health districts have the resources to ensure they are ready to deal with an outbreak. (Senate Bill 6366)

IMPROVING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE:

- **Expanding the Basic Health Plan (BHP).** The 2006 supplemental budget provides funding so an additional 6,500 people can enroll in the BHP, bringing total enrollment in this affordable option for low-income adults to 106,500.
- **Children's Health Insurance Program.** Last session, the Legislature made a commitment to providing all children in Washington children with health care coverage by 2010. To stay on target toward that goal, this year's supplemental budget provides additional funding so 10,000 more children (than are currently enrolled) can be enrolled in the Immigrant Children's Health Program, bringing the total enrollment to 14,000.

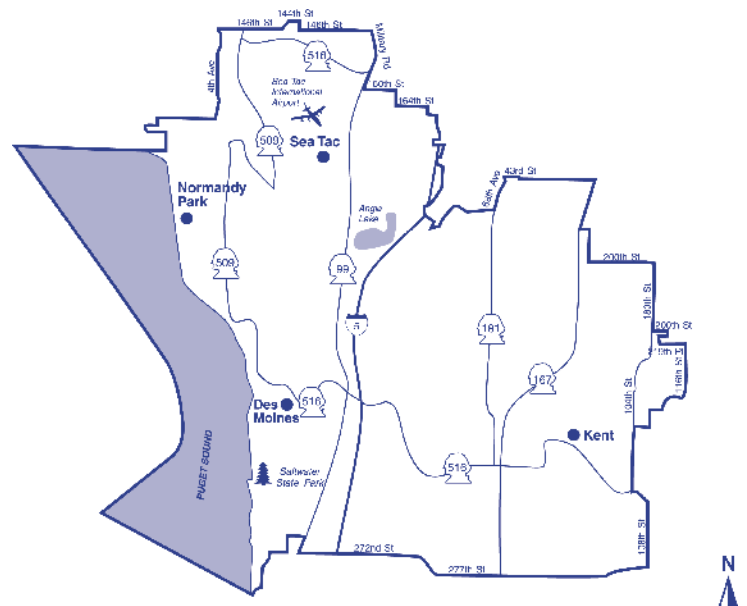
- **Small business partnership.** To help small employers find affordable insurance, this program will provide subsidies targeted to low-wage workers with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Small employers interested in participating are required to pay at least 40 percent of the cost of the total premium. (House Bill 2572)
- **Community-based health care.** Building upon ongoing community efforts to help the uninsured gain access to health care services, this measure creates a grant program to further the efforts of local groups, such as those now working in Spokane, Thurston County and Bellingham. (SB 6459)
- **Medicare prescription drug co-pays.** With the implementation of the new federal prescription drug benefit in January, about 100,000 of the state's most medically vulnerable residents were transferred from the Medicaid program to Medicare for their prescription drug coverage. In this budget, the Legislature provided funding so these low-income seniors, known as "dual eligibles," will not have to pay the \$1 to \$5 co-pays for their medicines – co-pays they didn't have to pay under Medicaid.

IMPROVING VALUE:

- **Evidence-based technology assessment.** With health care costs increasingly being driven by new and emerging health care technologies and treatments, the Legislature created a Technology Clinical Advisory Committee to use evidence-based methods to evaluate and make recommendations aimed at increasing the value of the health care services purchased by the state for low-income families, state employees and other state clients. (HB 2575)
- **Work site health assessments.** To encourage state employees to adopt healthier lifestyles, the Health Care Authority will develop an online health assessment tool that will enable employees to compare their health information with national norms and receive recommendations about how to improve their health. (Budget)

OTHER MAJOR ISSUES:

- **Medical malpractice reforms.** A landmark effort to resolve the contentious medical malpractice issue – given a kick by the voters' strong rebuke last fall of two competing initiatives – culminated in a legislative breakthrough this session that is aimed at improving patient safety, reforming practices in the medical malpractice insurance market and improving the civil justice system. (HB 2292)
- **Nursing homes.** The supplemental budget boosted payment rates for nursing homes by an average of 6 percent next year, better enabling them to take care of our fragile older citizens. (\$20 million state and federal)
- **Health care disparities.** In 2004, the Legislature created a task force to make recommendations about how to reduce the disproportionate burden of disease borne by minorities. This session the Legislature passed a package of bills that are aimed at closing the disparities gap by, among other things, calling for the development of a health care work force that is more representative of the communities it serves. (SB 6193, 6194, 6196, 6197)



33rd Legislative District